

Wireless Will Open Doors In Hartford

Eddie A. Perez

January 9 2006

In the city of Hartford, less than one-third of households have a working computer and Internet access at home. This means thousands of Hartford families do not have the ready access to information on jobs, services and education that the vast majority of Connecticut residents take for granted.

The Internet has so fully revolutionized our society that even basic functions such as registering children for classes or applying for entry-level jobs with large companies are virtually impossible without Internet access. Too many Hartford families are being left behind on the information superhighway.

To help close Hartford's digital divide, I announced an initiative earlier this year to provide Web access, computer equipment and training to Hartford families. Our goal is to build a free wireless network across our city, provide low-cost computer equipment to our residents, and train them in the basics of computer and Web usage.

Our effort is unlike those of municipalities trying to compete with private-sector companies who provide high-speed Internet access. We are looking to partner with private-sector companies to expand access to the two-thirds of Hartford families that are not being served by the private market.

Hartford has an existing fiber-optic network that branches into virtually every neighborhood in the city, linking our schools, firehouses and government buildings. This network can be adapted to serve as a backbone for a wireless network that will provide our all residents with basic high-speed Internet access.

Our existing technology infrastructure makes us an attractive partner to private-sector firms looking to serve more residents of urban communities in previously untapped markets. Our partnership will bring together the innovation and flexibility of the private sector with the commitment of the public sector to serve all our citizens.

Our goal is to have the Blue Hills and downtown neighborhoods go "live" with our private-sector partners by this summer. We would roll the program out to our other residential neighborhoods over the next two years.

This access will open doors to residents that up until now were, for all purposes, closed. Whether searching for jobs, registering for classes, reviewing health care information or learning more about government, our Internet access initiative has the potential to change the lives of residents for the better.

Eddie A. Perez is mayor of Hartford. He will speak Tuesday at the MetroHartford Alliance Rising Star Breakfast at the Hilton Hartford Hotel. For more information, go to www.metrohartford.com.

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